

# critical digest

VOL. IV No. 28

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

## New York Openings This Week

Golden Boy-ANTA Playhouse, 3/12/52. Third production of ANTA subscription series presents revival of Clifford Odets 1937 Group Theatre hit play. John Garfield, Lee J. Cobb and Art Smith featured in cast directed by author...Flight Into Egypt-Music Box, 3/13/52. Irene Mayer Selznick presents George Tabori's new play starring Paul Lukas and Gusti Huber, staged by Elia Kazan.

## Digests of Current Reviews

Paris '90-Booth, 3/4/52. Cornelia Otis Skinner solo production of a series of sketches and impressions inspired by painter Henri Toulouse-Lautrec defied normal criticism of the daily reviewers. Actually all enjoyed part of the 14 scenes, but they differed in matter of degree. Critics credited colorful backgrounds of Donald Oenslager score by Kay Swift, orchestration by Robert Russell Bennett and costumes by Helene Pons with a large amount of the success of the evening's entertainment. To a man they were amazed at the swiftness of the costume changes. Atkinson, Times, and Kerr, Herald-Tribune, were the most lukewarm. Agreeing with their colleagues that presentation, written and produced by Miss Skinner, was tailor-made for her fans, they feared that her sketches showed little penetration of character because she tried to cover the entire period. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, enjoyed the daring undertaking, and credited her lack of brilliant variety in her performance to first night jitters. Coleman, Mirror, warned adults not to take children to show, for they might ask embarrassing questions. Chapman, News, found most of the sketches interesting, some downright exciting. Admitting he is not a monodrama fan, Watts, Post, noted that with so much production the stage at times seemed ready to entertain an entire play. Most called performance Skinner's best. Each critic had his particular favorites in the sketches, with most favoring the third act portraits.

Women of Twilight-Plymouth, 3/3/52. Scenic Artists pickets marching outside the theatre opening night in opposition to the use of an imported English set by producers Joseph Kipness and Jack Hylton received more sympathetic comments from daily critics than Sylvia Rayman's script. Performed by an all-English female cast, the play, which is a current London hit, was harshly panned by all but two of the first night reviewers. McClain, Journal American, and Shaeffer, Eagle, found it a hard-hitting melodrama. Former called it an adult, incisive, psychological study providing liberal scope for some of the most capable performances of the season. He ranked Mary Merrall with top lady monsters of any year, while Betty Ann Davies and Lorraine Clewes were highly praised. Shaeffer didn't believe a word of story, but found much of it interesting. Kindest words Watts, Post, could find was that play wasn't boring. But Post man did find it clumsy, maudlin and silly. Atkinson, Times, lashed out at script and scenery, tabbing play the most repulsive of the year, the scenery as obsolete as the play. Several noted that scenic artists had nothing to worry about from Mary Purvis dreary set. Chapman, News, found pickets' costumes more entertaining than play. Coleman, Mirror, would like to see Gwendoline Watford in something better. Anthony Hawtrey's direction was generally condemned as not helping much.

## News & Notes

"Drama Desk" March 17 meeting to feature interview with Sol Pernick, Stagehand Union executive, on current theatre problems...League of NY Theatres to make use of imported scenery for plays a test case...Shows that closed include Affairs of State...

## ' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times              | 12. Chr.Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard    |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune     | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal      |
| 3. NY News               | 14. Morning Telegraph   | 25. Cue             |
| 4. NY Mirror             | 15. Ward Morehouse      | 26. Nation          |
| 5. NY Compass            | 16. George Jean Nathan  | 27. New Leader WEVD |
| 6. NY Post               | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic    |
| 7. NY Journal American   | 18. Women's Wear        | 29. Newsweek        |
| 8. NY World Telegram-Sun | 19. Billboard           | 30. New Yorker      |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle        | 20. Variety             | 31. Park East       |
| 10. L.I.Press            | 21. Critical Digest     | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News          | 22. Theatre Arts        | 33. Time            |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50  
THE CONSTANT WIFE-12/8/51  
THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51

Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3. None: 10-14-21-23.  
Con: 3-25-30. None: 11-13-14-15-17-18-21-26-28-31.  
Con: 2-6-15-16-22-24-27-30-33. None: 14-18-26-28-39-

GIGI-11/24/51

Con: 1-4-5-6-8-12-15-25-27-28-32-33.

None: 14-23.

Con: 26. None: 10-21.

Con: 3-5-7-12-27-28. So-So: 1. None: 10-13-14-18-21-  
26.

JANE-2/1/52

Con: 2-7-9-19-24-27-28-32+33.

None: 5-10-11

Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-24.

Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26-32.

Con: 4-7-23-27-30-33. None: 11-12-14-15-16-22-24-26-  
28-29-31-32.

PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51  
PAL JOEY-1/3/52  
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/  
REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/5

Con: 2-6-7-15-20-23-24. None: 14-18-27-28-32.

Con: 27. None: 13-14-17-28-31.

Con: 8-22-26-27-28-33. None: 7-11-14-21-23-31.

Con: 1-7-16-18-21-22-24-26-28-30-33.

None: 12-13-17.

Con: 8-16-22-26

Con: 38. So-So: 25. None: 9-10-11-21-26-27-28

Con: 25-26-27-30. So-So: 3. None: 10-21-22.

Con: 6-7-27; None: 12-26-28-32.

Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-27-32.

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'Theatre News Round Up'

March "Park East" includes portrait of Kerr, Herald-Tribune...Kronenberger, Time, interviewed by Harvey Briet, NY Times Book Review...Freedley, Morning Telegraph, to speak at University of Miami Shakespeare Festival in April...Robert Garland, ex-Journal American critic, to teach playwriting at New School for Social Research..."Show Business" starts 11th year...Robert Downing named editor of Stage Managers' Club "The Promptsides"...Antoinette Perry Awards to be given March 30...Julie Harris, I Am A Camera, spoke to Hunter College symposium...New York Central Railroad to poll commuters on their feelings about the 7:00 PM curtain Monday evenings at South Pacific...Jan Miner has withdrawn from current Palace Two-A-Day bill, Olsen & Johnson, Jose Greco and Jackie Miles head show starting March 17, with Betty Hutton heading April 12 show.

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' Green Room Department '  
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CRITICISM DEFINED...Criticism is the adventures of an intelligence amongst emotions, Stephen Williams, London Evening News reviewer, told "Gallery First Nighters Club" meeting, "Stage" reports. A critic should be able to write, be able to express his ideas in a way which is interesting to readers, have sound general knowledge and taste, a human and humane view of life in general and love the art he is writing about. It must be a hobby as well as a job, a passion as well as a profession. The critic must be jealous of his art in a vindictive sense.

MORE PUNS...Current crop of capsule critiques filed by Phillips, WT&S, include: Mrs. McThing-Harvey with Moppets instead of Rabbits...The Shrike-The Inconstant Wife ...Antony and Cleopatra-Guys and Dolls.

TEXAS BROADWAY...Dull week on Broadway forced Atkinson, Times, to Dallas and Houston in search of drama. Margo Jones' Theatre '52 current attraction Edward Caulfield's Blind Spot was panned by the traveling reviewer for its weak characters. But he was impressed by the \$2.50 top on tickets which makes it possible to spend an evening at theatre without having to rob a bank. Houston's Playhouse Arena version of The Happy Time, Alley Theatre's production of Strindberg's Miss Julia won praise. Both Dallas and Houston have active little theatre producing groups.

"HALL" TIME...New Yorkers miffed at not setting up a "Theatre Hall of Fame" only had 185 years to do something about it, points out "Equity" magazine in commenting on Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa, memorial to John Durang...Times reader claims pre-Revolutionary actor Samuel Greville of Princeton, who had a brief stage career in 1767, deserves the title "First American-Born Actor."

THEATRE IDEAS...Palace should restore Monday afternoon openings, suggests Coleman, Mirror...Christopher Fry should translate Lessing's Nathan the Wise states Ossia Trilling, Theatre...Richard Aldrich would like Hedy Lamarr and Joan Bennett to appear in summer shows at his Cape Cod playhouse he told Morehouse, WT&S.

COLUMN TIPS...A theatre group of Alcoholics Anonymous has been formed, reports Walker...Young actors building muscles at midtown gyms to try out for Josh Logan's Picnic, says Kilgallen...Theatre Collection of NY Public Library hunting "Angel" whose donation would bring card index up to date, informs Farrell.

ANTI BENEFITS...Theatre party business besides providing frightening and unappreciative audiences is a discouragement to the public, complains Chapman, News. Many have stopped going to theatre because they believe tickets are too hard to get due to the benefits. Gallant and unselfish move of producer Gilbert Miller in putting the returned twin Cleopatra tickets on sale at the box office was hailed.

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' Off Broadway '  
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Equity Library Theatre production of Lady in the Dark, now playing the Community Project circuit, championed by Variety and Billboard critics for showcasing a fine collection of dramatic and musical talent. Elizabeth Parrish won honors, with Jackson Young running a close second...Living Theatre's production of Picasso's Desire deserves the serious attention it has received in the staging, comments Rice, Post. Not everyone will like it, but no one can ignore it...Circle in Square's presentation of Lorca's Yerma is no more than a routine version of the Spanish script, in opinion of Pollock, Compass. Critic noted that group is becoming too complacent, their acting and direction doesn't seem to be improving at all.

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' Meet the Critic - Bob Francis '  
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TV is helping theatre build audiences in an unusual and positive way, Bob Francis told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. "Billboard" drama critic knows that many young TV actors are building out of town audiences for themselves. When these people come to NYC they want to see the acquaintances made on the screen. Even in NYC, he explained, people who are not theatre fans have expressed interest in knowing when certain actors would appear in a Broadway play.

As a trade paper reviewer, Francis believes his reports should be constructive, if possible. But he also views it as his duty to stop management from foisting trash on the public, such as Herman Shumlin was doing this season on the basis of his reputation. Criticism too often blasts at actors for no good reason, the critic explained while directors too often are taken up on minor points. If a play doesn't come off the first thing to blame is the script, not the actors. His colleagues have set forth too much pretentious hokum this season on the revivals, Francis complained. They should all have realized and stated that a script such as Desire Under the Elms is very much dated.

Cooperation between cast, staff and management to bring theatre costs down is the only answer to the economic problems of the theatre, Francis believes. As long as each department keeps piling on the costs and featherbedding is allowed to flourish, it never will get better. If actors worked on a minimum and percentage basis until the given play caught on, more plays could run longer. But first there must be a cooperative effort on the part of everyone in the theatre to bring costs down.

Francis has been "Billboard" drama editor and drama critic since 1942. In addition he also does some reviewing of TV shows for the weekly amusement trade paper. From 1935 to 1942 he was a feature writer and second string critic on the Brooklyn Eagle. His background includes extensive work on other newspapers and trade journals, starting as a cub reporter on the NY Tribune in 1920. For a time he syndicated very successfully two children's features throughout the world.

Though "Variety" has dropped its rating of critics by the number of hits they pick, "Billboard" continues to rate the critics annually in a continued effort to spur their critical accuracy. "Billboard" takes figure of 100 performances of a play to put it in "hit" class, while "Variety" called show "hit" only when investment paid off. Francis is also chairman of "Billboard" Donaldson Award Committee, the only award in the theatre industry which is selected by the voting of the entire industry.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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Samuel French donated \$100 prize for best play in sixth Annual National Writing Contest for Hospitalized Veterans...Shuberts to present summer season of operettas and musical comedy at White Plains, NY, County Center...Arthur Koestler won \$5000 award from Sidney Kingsley in Darkness at Noon dispute settled by three man arbitration board...Ziegfeld Club Award for outstanding musical comedy of season to be picked by Gabriel, Cue, Green, Variety, Hawkins, WT&S, Freedley, Morning Telegraph and Bernard Sobel..."Life" review of Mrs. McThing to be filed by nine year old son of Kerr, Herald Tribune... Sardi's celebrated 25th anniversary...Richard Rodgers considered early curtain on Monday nights with 31 fellow producers...G. Maillard Kesslere's gift of 6000 theatre photographs to be presented to Theatre Collection of NY Public Library April 5 at midnight reception at Kesslere's home...Women of Twilight producers to sue Scenic Artists Union for \$150,000 damages...Mammoth musicals planned for Jones Beach, LI, Marine Stadium this summer by Mike Todd...Paul Green plans to present outdoor drama at Plymouth Rock, Mass. next summer...Sam Selden to present outdoor drama on life of Daniel Boone this summer at Boone, N.C.

